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THE WIFE/SISTER INCIDENTS OF GENESIS: ORAL VARIANTS?

T.D. Alexander

The fact that the book of Genesis contains three episodes in which a patriarch pretends that his wife is his sister is quite remarkable. Not surprisingly, these narratives have attracted considerable attention. To explain this unusual phenomenon, it is frequently suggested that the three accounts are variant traditions which arose from one original story, or possibly two. On the basis of this assumption, attempts have been made (a) to determine the form of the original tradition(s), and (b) to explain their subsequent development.

In theory it is possible to explain the relationship between the accounts as follows:¹

(i) the three accounts are completely independent:

A B C

(ii) two of the accounts are independent, and the third is dependent upon one of the others:

A B	A B	B C	B C	C A	C A
C	C	A	A	B	B

(iii) two of the accounts are independent, and the third is dependent upon both of the others:

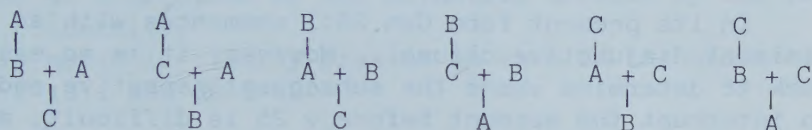
A B	B C	A C
\ /	\ /	\ /
C	A	B

(iv) one account is original, and the others are developments of it:

A	A	B	B	C	C
B	C	A	C	A	B
C	B	C	A	B	A

(v) one account is original, another is dependent upon

it, and the third is dependent upon both of these earlier accounts:



Since it is impractical to consider in detail all of these possibilities we shall adopt the following procedure. If, as is widely held, all three accounts are variants of one tradition, it ought to be possible to demonstrate this for any two of the episodes. We shall, therefore, compare initially 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13. Apart from being the most dissimilar, both narratives are usually ascribed to the Yahwistic source on the basis of style and vocabulary. The fact that duplicate accounts of the same incident should be preserved in one source is unusual, and merits special attention.

Before comparing the two accounts one problem must be resolved. This concerns the extent of the pericopes. Most scholars take 12:10-20 as the basic Abraham/Sarah account.² However, there are those who wish to extend the final form of the narrative to include 13:1,³ and Cassuto and Weimar maintain that, in its present form, the story concludes in 13:4.⁴ Of these options it is probably best to regard the narrative as extending from 12:10-13:1. The return of Abraham to the Negeb provides a fitting conclusion to the account of his journey into Egypt.

As regards chap. 26, Delitzsch, Dillmann, Holzinger, Skinner, Maly, von Rad, and Zimmerli base their comparison with 12:10-13:1 on vv 7-11.⁵ Driver, Gunkel, König and Speiser also include v 6.⁶ Westermann uses for his comparison vv 1-11,⁷ and Koch vv 1-13.⁸ Procksch, Hooke and Schmitt include all the material in 26:1-14.⁹ Culley, however, remains undecided as to whether v 14 should be included along with vv 1-13.¹⁰ With such a variety of possibilities it is apparent that no consensus exists regarding how much of chap. 26 should

be compared with 12:10-13:1.

In its present form Gen 26:1 commences with an 'initial disjunctive clause'. However, it is no easy task to determine where the subsequent narrative ends. To interrupt the account before v 25 is difficult, and it is even possible to argue that the narrative only comes to a natural break in v 33. However, for our present purpose we shall regard the first section of the chapter as extending to v 13.

To assist us in our comparison of 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13 we shall examine the two episodes under the headings (1) motif, (2) narrative details and (3) structure.

1. Motif

Petersen suggests that the wife-sister motif is comprised of the following features:¹¹

- (1) travel to a place in which the husband and wife are unknown (if such travel were not present, the ruse could not be undertaken);
- (2) a claim that the man's wife is his sister;
- (3) discovery of the ruse;
- (4) resolution of the situation created by the false identity.

This definition of the wife/sister motif is helpful. However, one feature ought to be added to those suggested by Petersen. The second element should be expanded to include the reason why the husband acts as he does: he claims that his wife is his sister, because he fears that he will be killed on her account. Without this additional element there is no rationale for the deception. The fear of death is the motivating factor behind the ruse. Incorporating this element into Petersen's proposal we obtain the following definition of the wife/sister motif:

1. Travel to a place in which the husband and wife are unknown (if such travel were not present, the ruse could not be undertaken).
2. A claim that the man's wife is his sister because

he fears being killed on account of her.

3. Discovery of the ruse.

4. Resolution of the situation created by the false identity.

This motif is clearly present in each of the accounts in 12:1-13:1 and 26:1-13.

2. Narrative Details

Although the wife/sister episodes in chaps. 12 and 26 employ the same motif, they differ considerably regarding the actual details of the incidents. There are at least eight differences worthy of note.

(1) The cast of characters varies in the two accounts. In 12:10-13:1 the main participants are Abram (Abraham), Sarai (Sarah), Pharaoh and the princes of Pharaoh. In 26:1-13 we encounter Isaac, Rebekah, Abimelech and the men of Gerar.

(2) The events occur in different locations. A famine in Canaan causes Abraham to go down to Egypt (12:1). When Isaac confronts a similar situation, he journeys to Gerar (26:1). There Yahweh appears to him and commands him to remain in Gerar rather than continue on into Egypt (26:2-6). Significantly, 26:1 refers back to the famine mentioned in 12:10: "Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham".

(3) The narratives differ in the way the reader learns of the ruse. In chap. 12 the deception is revealed through Abraham's speech to Sarah prior to their entry into Egypt (12:11-13). Fearing death on her account, Abraham asks Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister. In chap. 26 we learn of the deception in Isaac's reply to an inquiry by the men of Gerar concerning Rebekah (26:6-7). The rationale for Isaac's response is provided by the narrator, who reveals to us Isaac's thoughts on the matter (26:7). Rebekah, unlike Sarah, instigates the deception.

(4) After the ruse has been revealed to the reader the narratives diverge considerably. Whereas Sarah is taken away from Abraham, Rebekah remains with Isaac. Here we encounter a major difference between the two incidents. The Egyptians observe Sarah's beauty, and consequently she is taken to Pharaoh's house (12:14-16). Ironically, Abraham prospers on account of Sarah's departure. Rebekah, however, never leaves Isaac. They remain together as husband and wife, although to others they appear as brother and sister.

(5) The deceptions are discovered by different means. In chap. 12 Yahweh sends plagues upon Pharaoh's household (12:17). As a result of this divine intervention Pharaoh realizes his mistake and summons Abraham to appear before him. In chap. 26 there is no divine intervention. Abimelech, by chance, observes Isaac fondling Rebekah, and so uncovers the ruse. Summoning Isaac, he demands an explanation.

(6) The interviews between the respective rulers and patriarchs proceed differently. In chap. 12 only Pharaoh is recorded as speaking. The questions directed at Abraham receive no reply. Pharaoh makes it plain that he, and he alone, has been the victim of the ruse. Then, without giving Abraham an opportunity to respond, he commands that the couple be expelled from Egypt (12:20). Abimelech, on the other hand, makes an initial inquiry of Isaac and receives a reply. He then expresses his horror at Isaac's action and highlights the terrible consequences which might have befallen the whole nation. Abimelech, unlike Pharaoh, is primarily concerned with the potential danger of the situation. He proceeds to warn his subjects, providing protection for Isaac and Rebekah against bodily and sexual assault respectively.

(7) The incidents are dissimilar in their conclusions. Pharaoh's speech leads to the swift departure of Abraham and Sarah from Egypt (12:20-13:1). Isaac, however, remains in Gerar under the protection of

Abimelech. There Yahweh blesses him with an abundant harvest, and he prospers remarkably. Whereas Abraham grows rich as a direct consequence of pretending that Sarah is his wife (12:16), Isaac's prosperity is only very indirectly related to the wife/sister deception.

(8) The episodes may be distinguished by the feature of 'completeness'. The events in chap. 12 leave many questions unanswered. Did Abraham actually allow Pharaoh to take Sarah without objecting? Did Pharaoh commit adultery with Sarah? How did Pharaoh discover that the plagues were due to his abduction of Sarah? Moreover, not only do such questions remain unanswered, but there is no description of how the characters were affected emotionally. In contrast, the chap. 26 account leaves few, if any, questions to be answered. Also, it portrays the feelings of the characters in greater detail. For this reason it is more complete.

This brief comparison of the accounts reveals a number of substantial differences between the two plots. Although both accounts use the same motif, they differ significantly in their narrative details.

3. Structure

Not only are the episodes in chaps. 12 and 26 dissimilar concerning their narrative details, but they also exhibit different structures. Weimar outlines the structure of 12:10-20 as follows:¹²

A	<u>Exposition</u>	12,10	Action (<u>Abraham</u>)
B	1. Scene	12,11-13	<u>Speech of Abraham</u> (addressing Sarai)
C	2. Scene	12,14-16a	Action (Egyptians/courtiers of Pharaoh/Pharaoh)
B'	3. Scene	12,17-19	<u>Speech of Pharaoh</u> (addressing Abraham)
A'	<u>Conclusion</u>	12,20	Action (Pharaoh)

The account is constructed around the monologues of

Abraham (vv 11-13) and Pharaoh (vv 18-19). The symmetry of the structure is improved by the inclusion of 13:1 which reverses Abraham's action in 12:10. Licht suggests that v 15 forms a tricolon "describing the pivotal fact of the story":¹³

"So they saw her, the courtiers of Pharaoh
and they praised her to Pharaoh

and the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh".
He also suggests that on either side of this tricolon the phrases 'my sister' (vv 13,19) and 'go well' (vv 13,16) are repeated in reverse order to form a "carefully balanced composition".

As regards 26:1-13 Weimar suggests the following structure:¹⁴

Exposition (26,1a α b)

I. Scene (26,2a α .3a.6): Jahweh-Isaac

1. Appearance speech of Jahweh (26,2a α ,3a)
2. Fulfilment notice (Isaac) (26,6)

II. Scene (26,7-9,11): Gerarites-Abimelek-Isaac

1. Report-Speech-Report (26,7-8)
2. Dialogue Abimelek-Isaac + Edict of Abimelek (26,9+11)

III. Scene (26,12-13): Isaac

1. Report (Blessing of Jahweh) (26,12)
2. Concluding Notice (26,13)

Although both accounts contain three scenes, they are in no way comparable. Furthermore, it is apparent that 12:10-13:1 has a much more clearly defined structure based upon a concentric pattern.

Van Seters offers an alternative way of viewing the structure of 12:10-20. He suggests the the narrative follows a 'relatively simple and straightforward' structure commonly found in folk literature:¹⁵

a) a situation of need, problem, or crisis

v 10

- b) a plan to deal with the problem vv 11-13
- c) execution of the plan with some complication vv 14-16
- d) an unexpected outside intervention v 17a
- e) fortunate or unfortunate consequences vv 17b-20

This structure, however, cannot be applied to 26:1-13. A difficulty arises with part (d) 'an unexpected outside intervention'. In 12:17a Yahweh intervenes by sending plagues on Pharaoh's household. In chap. 26, however, there is no divine intervention. After the introduction of the deception the only unexpected intervention which occurs comes from Abimelech (vv 8-9). Yet it is this very action which complicates the initial plan (cf. part c). Clearly, the account in chap. 26 cannot be made to fit the structure suggested by van Seters for 12:10-13:1. Thus, whether one adopts the approach of Weimar or van Seters, it is apparent that 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13 exhibit quite different structures.

Our comparison of the wife/sister incidents in chaps. 12 and 26 suggests that although the episodes employ the same motif, they are very dissimilar when one considers such features as narrative details and structure. If both stories are variant accounts of the same event, it is obvious that in the process of transmission very substantial alterations have been made, either to one or both of the accounts. Alternatively, it is equally possible that we have here reports of two quite separate events.¹⁶ At present the weight of evidence would tend to favour this latter possibility, especially when one recalls that both episodes are normally assigned to the Yahwistic source.

Having compared 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13, let us now introduce the third wife/sister story, 20:1-18, into our discussion. How does this episode relate to those we have already considered?

1. Motif

The account of Abraham's sojourn in Gerar (20:1-18) contains all the elements of the wife/sister motif as outlined above. Abraham's move to the region of Gerar causes him to pretend that Sarah is his sister (vv 1-2a). When Abimelech takes her (v 2b), God intervenes and reveals the deception (vv 3-7). Finally, Abimelech restores Sarah to Abraham along with various gifts (vv 9-16).

2. Narrative Details

The wife/sister account in chap. 20 differs in various ways from those found in chaps. 12 and 26.

(1) The cast of chap. 20 brings together characters from both 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13; Abraham and Sarah encounter Abimelech king of Gerar. Yet, whereas the other episodes refer to God as Yahweh, chap. 20, apart from v 18, uses the designation Elohim.

(2) The setting in chap. 20 is Gerar. This locale obviously excludes the possibility of Pharaoh being the foreign ruler. Significantly, chap. 20 differs from 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13 regarding the motive for the patriarch's journey to Gerar. Famine caused Abraham and Isaac to move to alien regions in chaps. 12 and 26 respectively. In chap. 20, however, there is no mention of a famine. Indeed no explanation is offered for Abraham's journey to Gerar.

(3) The way in which the deception is introduced to the reader in chap. 20 differs considerably from that found in the other accounts. In half a verse we are informed: 'Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister"' (v 2a). The very minimum of detail is given. At this stage no reason is provided for Abraham's action; only subsequently is an explanation given (vv 11-13). In chaps. 12 and 26, however, the rationale for the deception comes towards the beginning of the accounts (12:11-13; 26:6-7). Also, Sarah's beauty is not

mentioned directly in chap. 20. Yet the beauty of the patriarch's wife plays a prominent role in the other accounts (cf. 12:11,15; 26:7).

(4) The plot in chap. 20 involves the separation of husband and wife. This makes it resemble more closely 12:10-13:1. No such separation occurs in 26:1-13. The brief description of the deception in v 2a is immediately followed by the statement that Abimelech sent for and took Sarah (v 2b). How he came to know of her is unrecorded; there is no mention of Sarah being praised to Abimelech by others (cf. 12:15). Also, there is no suggestion that Abraham received gifts following Sarah's departure (cf. 12:16). Significantly, what requires six verses in episode A for the progression of the plot (12:11-16) is compressed into one verse (v 2) in chap. 20.

(5) The way in which the ruse is discovered in chap. 20 finds no parallel in the other episodes. God appears to Abimelech in a dream and reveals the full consequences of his actions. In chap. 12 Yahweh sends plagues upon Pharaoh and his household, and in chap. 26 Abimelech observes Isaac fondling Rebekah. Although it is later revealed that God did send a plague upon Abimelech's house (20:17-18), this only becomes relevant towards the end of the account. It is the dream, rather than the plague, which leads to the discovery of the ruse.

The dream, according to Petersen, performs two main functions within the narrative:¹⁷ (a) it comes as a timely intervention preventing actual adultery; (b) it allows the author to introduce the theme of guilt/innocence. The dialogue which constitutes the dream revolves around the issue of Abimelech's innocence; he will not die for taking another man's wife (20:3-7). God acknowledges the truth of this statement, and comments that he actually intervened in order to prevent Abimelech touching Sarah. Here the dream introduces an issue which neither of the other stories considers.

(6) Abimelech's interview with Abraham is quite dissimilar from the parallels in 12:10-13:1 and 26:1-13. The encounter in 20:9-16 is approximately four times longer than the respective accounts in 12:18-19 and 26:9-10, and as such it provides the fullest explanation as to why Abraham called Sarah his sister. Abraham not only informs Abimelech that this was his usual practice wherever he went, but he also defends his action by indicating that Sarah was indeed his half-sister.¹⁸ Significantly, Abimelech concedes that Abraham is in the right, and he himself in the wrong. He then compensates both Abraham and Sarah. In chap. 12, however, Pharaoh apparently acknowledges no guilt on his own part. Whereas Abimelech offers Abraham the freedom to live where he chooses, Pharaoh expels him from Egypt. In Isaac's encounter with Abimelech (26:9-11) the discussion centres on what might have happened had Abimelech not uncovered the ruse.

Another difference between the accounts concerns the way in which the patriarch gains wealth. In chap. 20 Abraham is enriched when Sarah is returned (v 16). In chap. 12, however, Abraham receives riches when Sarah is taken into Pharaoh's household (v 16). Isaac, on the other hand, blessed by Yahweh, grows wealthy through his own labours as a farmer (26:12-13).

(7) The events in the final verses of chap. 20 are unique to this account. Abraham, as a prophet (cf. v 7), prays to God to heal Abimelech, his wife and female slaves; a divine plague prevents Abimelech's household from bearing children. Abraham's intercession restores things to their former order. In the other incidents the patriarch does not exercise such a mediatorial role.

(8) When compared for 'completeness' chap. 20 offers the fullest explanation of Abraham's motive for declaring that his wife is his sister (20:11-13). Also, the topic of guilt receives greater treatment. Yet, in marked contrast, chap. 20 contains the shortest account of the actual deception and abduction.

From this comparison of the narrative details it appears that chap. 20 differs from the other accounts in a variety of ways. Although some similarities exist, 20:1-18 has quite a number of distinctive features.

3. Structure

As regards the structure of 20:1-18 Weimar proposes the following outline:¹⁹

Exposition (20,1.2): Abraham-Abimelek

I. Scene (20,3-7): Elohim-Abimelek

1. Speech of Elohim (in dream) (20,3.4a)
2. Speech of Abimelek (to Elohim) (20,4b.5)
3. Speech of Elohim (in dream) (20,6.7)

II. Scene (20,8.9a.10-12): Abimelek-servants-Abraham

1. Action (+ Speech) of Abimelek (Servants) (20,8)
2. Speech(es) of Abimelek (to Abraham) (20,9a.10)
3. Speech of Abraham (to Abimelek) (20,11.12)

III. Scene (20,14-18): Abimelek-Abraham-Sarah

1. Action of Abimelek (Abraham) (20,14)
2. Speech of Abimelek (to Abraham und Sarah) (20,15.16)
3. Action (Intercession of Abraham + healing by Elohim) (20,17.18)

Weimar's division of the narrative into three scenes reflects his own supposition that the oldest form of the tradition contained three scenes.²⁰ Yet, as it stands at present, the narrative consists of only two main scenes (vv 3-7; 8-17). The former scene occurs during the night, the latter by day. Whereas the first scene consists of a carefully constructed palistrophe, the second makes use of parallel panels:

Introduction (20:1-2): Abraham - Abimelech

1. Travel to Gerar (v 1)
2. Deception and abduction (v 2)

Scene I. (20:3-7): God appears to Abimelech in a dream by night

- A v 3 Behold you are a dead man
- B v 3 You have taken a man's wife
- C v 4 Abimelech has not approached her
- D v 4 Abimelech claims to be innocent
- E v 5 In the integrity of my heart
- F v 6 God said to him in a dream
- E' v 6 In the integrity of my heart
- D' v 6 God kept him from sinning
- C' v 6 I did not let you touch her
- B' v 7 Restore the man's wife
- A' v 7 You shall live; if not you shall die

Scene II. (20:8-17a): Abraham appears before Abimelech by day

- A Abimelech reveals his dream to his servants (v 8)
- B Abimelech questions Abraham (v 9)
- C Abimelech again questions Abraham (v 10)
- D Abraham explains his actions (vv 11-13)
- A' Abimelech gives Abraham gifts (v 14)
- B' Abimelech offers Abraham land (v 15)
- C' Abimelech vindicates Sarah (v 16)
- D' Abraham prays for Abimelech (v 17a)

Conclusion (20:17b-18): God - Abimelech

1. God heals Abimelech's household (vv 17b-18)

Although scene I reveals a carefully constructed palistrophe, the structure of scene II is perhaps less obvious. Verses 8-17a comprise eight paragraphs, the initial subject of each of the first four paragraphs being paralleled in the second half of the structure.

When 20:1-18 is considered in the light of van Seters' treatment of 12:10-20, the first three elements of his structure constitute merely two verses out of eighteen (vv 1-2). On the other hand, whereas chap. 12 takes only three verses to record the discovery of the

ruse and Abraham's subsequent encounter with Pharaoh, the equivalent events in chap. 20 are expanded to fourteen verses (3-16).

From the above discussion it is clear that although all three wife/sister stories employ the same motif, they differ considerably regarding narrative details and structure.

If the wife/sister accounts are duplicate records of the same original event, how does one account for the differences which now exist between them? Koch explains the variations between the separate episodes as the result of oral transmission: "The divergences in the three narratives do not seem to have arisen intentionally, but rather through the course of oral transmission which will probably have taken place in different regions, and perhaps at different times."²¹ He also assumes that, "all three tales about the ancestress of Israel once circulated as independent narratives."²² But is Koch correct in assuming that (a) the divergence between the accounts is unintentional, and (b) the three accounts circulated independently of one another?

When the three episodes are placed side by side it is remarkable that no two narratives expand on the same part of the tradition. This may be illustrated as follows:

	<u>chap. 12</u>	<u>chap. 20</u>	<u>chap. 26</u>
Reason for local	v 10	v 1	vv 1-6a
The deception occurs	vv 11-13	v 2a	vv 6b-7
Abduction of wife	vv 14-16	v 2b	-
Discovery of ruse	v 17	vv 3-7	v 8
Interview with foreign ruler	vv 18-19	vv 8-16	vv 9-10
Final outcome	v 20,13:1	vv 17-18	vv 11-13

This comparison of the accounts suggests that they have been harmonised to prevent any unnecessary

duplication when viewed as part of a larger work. Thus, for example, in chap. 20 the plan of the deception and Sarah's abduction are described in one verse. In chap. 12, however, this part of the account occupies six verses. On the other hand, Abraham's encounter with Abimelech (20:8-16) is recounted in substantially more detail than the equivalent encounter with Pharaoh (12:18-19). That the narratives assumed this form due to oral development alone seems most unlikely. Koch's view that, "the divergence in the three narratives do not seem to have arisen intentionally", must be rejected. If the episodes were true oral variants we would surely observe a greater degree of overlap between them.

Nor is it apparent that all three accounts originally circulated in oral form independently of one another. Thus van Seters argues that the narratives in chaps. 20 and 26 never existed orally. Rather, they are literary compositions based upon the account in 12:10-20.²³

Central to van Seters's approach is the belief that the chap. 12 account represents the oldest form of the wife/sister tradition.²⁴ The structure of 12:10-20, and its self-contained nature, both indicate that the narrative had an oral background.²⁵ As regards 20:1-18, he concludes that it was composed as a literary work dependent on 12:10-20:

Story B is not simply a variant tradition that has slowly evolved somewhat differently from that of story A. It bears no marks of such an oral tradition, either in its basic structure or in its manner of telling. At every point where there is a difference between story A and story B, the latter has given up the folktale point of interest for moral and theological concerns. Finally, story B exhibits a number of "blind motifs," foreshortening, and backward allusions that can only be accounted for by viewing it as directly dependent upon story A.²⁶ This last observation is worth underlining. The brief way in which chap. 20 outlines Abraham's plan (v 2a) and

Abimelech's abduction of Sarah (v 2b) clearly presupposes that the reader is already aware of a similar development. Without prior knowledge of 12:11-15 the events recorded in 20:2 are incomprehensible. Similarly, the comment in 20:13, "at every place to which we come", suggests that the author of this verse was already familiar with an account in which Abraham pretends that Sarah is his sister. As Westermann observes, "Ch. 20 presumes a knowledge of ch. 12."²⁷

The same arguments apply to 26:1-13. Van Seters suggests that the form of the story in chap. 26 does not follow a folktale model.²⁸ Rather story C is a "literary conflation of both the other stories" with the purpose of paralleling the life of Isaac with that of Abraham.²⁹ Westermann also accepts that 26:1-13 presupposes the earlier wife/sister episodes: "Gen 26:1-11 is no more an independent and originally oral narrative that is 20:1-18. It is a literary imitation of 12:10-20 which at the same time takes up motifs from 20:1-18."³⁰

There are, however, a number of scholars who argue that 26:1-13 reflects the earliest form of the wife/sister narrative.³¹ This view is based on the assumption that story C reflects a more natural, and therefore more original, form of the tradition. It is argued, for example, that the most primitive version of the story lacked any divine intervention. Only as the tradition developed was this element introduced.³² For the same reason, Abimelech and Gerar are taken to be more original than Pharaoh and Egypt. "It is much easier to imagine a story being transferred from a relatively small and insignificant king and country to one that is generally known, such as Egypt and its ruler, than it would be the other way round."³³ Similarly, Isaac is thought to be more original than Abraham.

The general rule in the transmission of the saga is that the least known figure is the original (compare the change from the king of Gerar to the Pharaoh of Egypt). Accordingly Isaac was originally the subject; he was later replaced by Abraham, who for

the Israelites represented their ideal of the god-fearing Israelite.³⁴

These arguments for the priority of 26:1-13 depend upon two important assumptions. First, oral traditions always develop in exactly the same way: the more natural account may be reckoned to be the oldest; the least known figure is the more original. Secondly, the account in chap. 26 circulated orally prior to its inclusion in Genesis. Yet both of these assumptions are highly questionable. It is extremely difficult to verify or falsify general statements about the way in which oral accounts may have developed. Can one assume that, without exception, all oral traditions develop in exactly the same way? Probably not! A more immediate problem, however, is whether or not the account in chap. 26 ever circulated as an independent oral story. Van Seters rejects the oral origin of story C. Furthermore, he and Westermann both accept that 26:1-13 presupposes the other wife/sister episodes. These observations hardly sustain the view that story C is the most primitive account.

On the basis of the preceding discussion we may make three general observations regarding the wife/sister episodes in Genesis. First, apart from having the same basic motif, they diverge considerably regarding narrative details and structure. If the episodes are duplicate accounts of the same event, they must have had a long oral history in order for the stories to have developed such differing features. The existing differences could hardly have arisen over a short period of time. Secondly, the narratives avoid unnecessary repetition of details and expand upon quite different aspects of the wife/sister motif. These differences cannot be explained solely on the basis of oral transmission. The narratives have been shaped to some extent by a literary process. Thirdly, the episodes in chaps. 20 and 26 presuppose that the reader is already familiar with the account in chap. 12. This also points to a process of literary composition in, at least, the later stages of the development of accounts B and C. Clearly these three factors have important implications

for our understanding of the process by which these accounts were composed and incorporated into the book of Genesis.

Unfortunately, in the past, many scholars have jumped too quickly to the assumption that the wife/sister episodes must all relate to one original incident, and that the differences between them are due to the process of oral transmission. But, as we have demonstrated above, one cannot assume that the present shape of the narratives represents accurately their form during oral transmission. The task of reconstructing the oral and redactional history of these accounts is much more involved than is generally acknowledged.

Notes

1. For convenience we shall refer to the three accounts as A (12:10-13:1), B (20:1-18) and C (26:1-13).
2. A. Dillmann, Genesis (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897) 16-21; E. H. Maly, "Genesis 12,10-20; 20,1-18; 26:7-11 and the Pentateuchal Question," CBQ 18 (1956) 255-62; E. A. Speiser, Genesis (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964) 89-94; W. Zimmerli, 1. Mose 12-25: Abraham (Zürich: Theologischer, 1976) 24-29; C. Westermann, Genesis 12-36 (SPCK, 1986) 159-168.
3. H. Gunkel, Genesis (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 168-73; J. Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (ICC; 2d ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930) 247-51; K. Koch, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition (London: Black, 1969) 111-32; G. von Rad, Genesis. A Commentary (OTL; revised ed.; London: SCM, 1972) 167-70; D. L. Petersen, "A Thrice-told Tale: Genre, Theme and Motif," BR 18 (1973) 30-43.
4. U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964) 2, 334-65; P. Weimar, Untersuchungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuch (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977)

48-51.

5. F. J. Delitzsch, New Commentary on Genesis (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888/89) 2, 139-40; A. Dillmann, Genesis, 204-205; H. Holzinger, Genesis (Leipzig/Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1898) 175-76; Skinner, Genesis, 363-65; Maly, "Genesis 12,10-20; 20,1-18; 26:7-11," 255-62; von Rad, Genesis, 271; Zimmerli, 1. Mose 12-25, 24-29.
6. S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis (Westminster Commentaries; London: Methuen, 1905) 251; Gunkel, Genesis, 301; E. König, Die Genesis (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1925) 580-82; Speiser, Genesis, 91.
7. Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 424-426.
8. Koch, Growth, 111-32.
9. O. Procksch, Die Genesis (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche, 1924) 155-58; S. H. Hooke, In the Beginning (Clarendon Bible; Oxford: Clarendon, 1947) 95-96; G. Schmitt, "Zu Gen 26:1-14," ZAW 85 (1973) 143-56.
10. R. C. Culley, Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative (Philadelphia/Missoula: Fortress/Scholars 1976) 33-41.
11. Petersen, "Thrice-told Tale," 35-36.
12. Weimar, Redaktionsgeschichte, 16.
13. J. Licht, Storytelling in the Bible (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) 91-92.
14. Weimar, Redaktionsgeschichte, 93.
15. Van Seters, Abraham, 168-69.
16. Speiser (Genesis, 151; cf. Delitzsch, Genesis, 1, 383-84) comments: "The two narratives are...entirely appropriate in a work by an individual author...J knew of two occasions (a,c) when a patriarch thought it necessary to introduce his wife as a sister; there is in them no duplication of principals, locale, or generations."
17. Petersen "Thrice-told Tale," 38-39.
18. I.e., Abraham and Sarah have the same father but different mothers. The response of Abraham to Abimelech raises an interesting problem when viewed in the light of Lev 18:9, which legislates against man marrying his half-sister. Either the author of Genesis 20 was unaware of this regulation, or he

- preferred to ignore it. M. Noth (A History of Pentateuchal Traditions /Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965⁷ 136) attempts to reconcile the two passages: "The prohibition of sexual intercourse with a half-sister (v. 9) does not necessarily include a veto on marriage with a half-sister (cf. Gen. 20.12)." However, G. W. Ramsey (The Quest for the Historical Israel /London: SCM, 1982⁷ 143, n. 119) suggests that the conflict between Genesis 20 and Leviticus 18 argues for the antiquity of the Genesis tradition.
19. Weimar, Redaktionsgeschichte, 71.
 20. Ibid. 69.
 21. Koch, Growth, 122.
 22. Ibid. 118.
 23. Van Seters, Abraham, 167-83.
 24. This is the view not only of Gunkel (Genesis, 225-26), whom van Seters follows, but also, among others, of Procksch (Genesis, 100), Skinner (Genesis, 264-65), Petersen, "Thrice-told Tale," 30-43) and more recently Westermann (Genesis 12-36, 159-168) and R. Aharoni, "Three Similar Stories in Genesis", Beth Mikra 77 (1979) 213-23.
 25. Cf. van Seters, Abraham, 167-71. To support this view he invokes the "epic laws" of Axel Olrik, "Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung," Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum 51 (1909) 1-12. It is doubtful, however, if these "epic laws" are sufficiently refined in order to distinguish oral and written works; cf. D. M. Gunn, "On Oral Tradition: A Response to John van Seters," Semeia 5 (1976) 159; W. O. Hendricks, "Folklore and the Structural Analysis of Literary Texts," Language and Style 3 1970 86; S. M. Warner, "Primitive Saga Men," VT 29 (1979) 335. It should also be noted that as the first of the wife/sister episodes which the reader encounters in the Genesis, 12:10-13:1 must of necessity be able to stand alone.
 26. Van Seters, Abraham, 175.
 27. Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 318; cf. E. Jacob, Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis (Berlin: Schocken, 1934)

- 547-51; S. McEvenue, "Review of John van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition", Bib 58 (1977) 575. G. W. Coats (Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature /FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983/ 151) comments, "It (chap. 20) cannot be shunted aside from ch. 12 as a duplicate source or as an independent version."
28. Van Seters, Abraham, 176.
29. Ibid. 183.
30. Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 424; cf. Schmitt, "Zu Gen 26:1-14," 143-55.
31. These include A. Kuenen, An Historio-critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch, (London: Macmillan, 1886) 234-35; J. Wellhausen, Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der Historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1889) 23; Holzinger, Genesis, 176; Maly, "Genesis 12,10-20; 20:1-18; 26:7-11," 260-61; Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, 105; R. Kilian, Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferungen (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1966) 213-15; S. Nomoto, "Entstehung und Entwicklung der Erzählung von der Gefährdung der Ahnfrau," Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute 2 (1976) 3-27; Zimmerli, 1. Mose 12-25, 25; R. Rendtorff, Das Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977) 31-32; Weimar, Redaktionsgeschichte, 102-107.
32. Cf. Kuenen, Historio-critical Inquiry, 235; Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, 105; Koch, Growth, 125.
33. Koch, Growth, 125.
34. Ibid. 126.

Some Personifications of Death in the Old Testament

John Barclay Burns

The figure of death is personified under various guises in the OT. This paper sets out to identify and examine some of these in the context of the OT itself, with attention given to comparative ancient near eastern mythology. Death is personified under the following headings: Death the Hunter; The First-Born of Death; Death the King of Terrors; Death the Shepherd; Powers of Death; Death the Robber. /1

Death the Hunter

In Ecclesiastes 7.26 and 9.12 Death is personified in the form of a hunter; in the first by inference and in the second directly.

And I find more bitter than Death, that woman whose heart is hunting-nets and dragnets; he who pleases God escapes from her, but the sinner is seized by her.

herem, "net" is a dragnet designed to catch large quantities of fish. /2 māsôd is a hunting-net. In Job 19.16 it is the net which Yahweh closes round the harried Job. The woman in Ecclesiastes 7.26 is the ʾiššāh zārāh, the "foreign woman" who also appears in Proverbs 2.5 and 7. It is against the wiles of this woman that the strong admonitions of the wisdom teacher are directed. In Proverbs she is closely linked with death and the underworld. Her house sinks down to death and her paths lead to the shades (2.18). Those who visit her never regain the paths of life. Her own feet go down to Death and Sheol (5.5) and her house is a very anteroom to the halls of death (7.27). The wisdom teacher is saying that any association with this woman leads to social and moral death. In Ecc 7.26 she is "more bitter than Death". They are both hunters. Death, however, is a swift and merciful killer. The woman causes a man to endure a living

death.

For a man does not even know ~~this~~ time;
like fish taken in a net and ~~like~~ birds
captured in a bird-snare, like them men
are taken in an evil time. (9.12)

‘ittô, "his time", is to be understood as the time of death. ~~rā āh~~, "bad", should be deleted after net. pah is specifically a snare for catching birds. Death, the Hunter, comes with unpredictable and devastating suddenness, snaring humans like unwary fish or birds

A similar figure is found in Proverbs 13.14 where the teachings of the sage are compared to a wellspring of life, offering escape from the "snares of death". In 14.27 it is the "fear of Yahweh" that provides escape from Death's snares. The man who amasses wealth by deceit and sharp practice falls helpless victim to the traps of the grim huntsman in Prov. 21.6.

This image of Death as a hunter, fisherman or bird-catcher has been linked with Mot, the Canaanite god of the underworld. /3 Mot appears chiefly as a sluggish but rapacious monster waiting for his prey to come to him. I believe that the imagery is Egyptian in origin.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead represents the doom of death as a net that traps its victims and drags them down to the underworld. In chapter 153A the deceased says:

.....do not take me in this net which
is the one in which you take the "tired ones";
do not trap me in the snare which is yours
in which you trap the "wandering ones"

The "tired ones" and the "wandering ones" are the dead. Here the net itself is personified. The deceased had to know the names of the parts of the net to obtain power over it and escape. Thus he would pass from being potential prey to predator.

.....I (the deceased) have come as a
fisher with the net, my netting needles in
my hand; I have come out, I go about, my prey
is in my net.

Sheol they are set" after vir em, "he herds them". Death is the grim shepherd dragooning his helpless flock to the underworld.

Powers of Death's Kingdom.

Death's Messengers.

Proverbs 16.14a asserts that,

The wrath of a king (is) Death's two messengers.

In Ugaritic mythology, Baal has two messengers, Gpn-w-Ugr, "Vine-and-Field." They are always mentioned together and, from their names, would seem to assist Baal in his function as a fertility god. In the Baal Epic, these messengers are sent by Baal to the underworld to refuse the tribute that Mot, the god of death, has demanded. Soon they return bringing terrifying word of Mot's fearful appetite which Baal cannot hope to escape. Without further ado Baal sends "Vine-and-Field" with a message of submission. By a clever ruse, Baal creates what is really a clone and sends it to the underworld. Mot and "Vine-and-Field" are successfully deceived and Mot, presumably, sends the two messengers to the father of the gods, El, who live at the confluence of two rivers, to inform him of Baal's fate. /10 It has been suggested that these two emissaries are another pair who belong to Mot since they are unnamed in Baal 1* ii 16f. /11 But there is no good reason to suppose that they are other than "Vine-and-Field", now servants without a master, who accept Mot's commission to bear the tragic news to El. Their euphemistic reference to the underworld as a "pleasant place" seems tinged with an almost hysterical relief at their own escape.

The Ugaritic text is not the clearest. But it is not unreasonable to conjecture that the two messengers in the Ugaritic text may allow one to propose a dual in the Hebrew. This would reflect the persistence of the Canaanite myth of Mot(Death) sending two messengers to

El with their calamitous news. A single messenger has been proposed, a "herald of death". /12 Two objections may be raised to this. The first is that the word in the Masoretic text is a masculine plural construct and in an unvocalized text could be construed as a dual without difficulty. In the second place, "herald of death" does not take into account the persistence of the myth which endowed the ire of an absolute monarch with death-dealing power. The word-play in hamat-melek mal'ake māwet must also be noted

Death and Sheol

These powers of Death's kingdom are paired in Canticles 8.6; Hosea 13.14; Isaiah 28.15a,18a; Job 27.15 and 28.23.

The Song of Songs (Canticles) is a sophisticated and courtly poetic celebration of erotic love. Towards the end of the book, embedded in lush and exotic imagery, 8.6b is a sharp reminder of the overwhelming power of love. It may even comment obliquely on the destructive nature of uncontrollable passion.

For Love is powerful as Death
Passion unrelenting as Sheol

Love and Death exercise similar force. In the face of love as in the face of death, resistance is futile. Passion, qin ah, is relentless as Sheol which devours its victims indiscriminately. It may be that Death and Sheol are used here with superlative intent - love is very strong, passion untiringly cruel. But the evocative force of reference to the powers of death's kingdom should not be underestimated.

Hosea 13.14 mentions Death and Sheol again as a pair:

Shall I ransom them from the hand of Sheol,
shall I redeem them from Death?
Where are your plagues, Death?
Where is your pestilence, Sheol?
Pity is hidden from my eyes.

153B has a similar theme of the dead escaping from the nets of fishers and fowlers. /4

Two Psalms, 18.6 and 116.3 provide further evidence for the personification of death as a hunter.

The cords of Sheol were wound about me,
the snare of Death confronted me.

hebel, "rope", is a snare made from a cord, possibly deriving from the Akkadian eblu, "a line of rope". /5 Sheol and Death are powers emanating from the underworld, represented as hunters lurking with their implements to trap their unwary prey. The Annunaki gods of the Mesopotamian underworld apparently possessed a net which drew people to death:

sapar^da-nun-na-ki ilāni ig-du-ti
The net of the Annunaki (gods) drags down. /6

Ps. 116.3, with the emendation of mešârê, "distresses" to mešōdê, "nets" provides a similar image:

The cords of death bound me,
the hunting-nets of Sheol gripped me.

The use of these figures is to indicate the considerable anguish expressed by the Psalmist.

Finally, in Job 18. 8-10, Bildad, one of Job's "comforters", warns of the fate of the recalcitrant wicked in terms of darkness and death. Death and his minions set traps, gins and nets to bring about his destruction. It is clear that the man is the prey of Death the Hunter, a conclusion reinforced by the next two personifications of Death to be considered. The author of Job uses the mythical figure of Death the Hunter to provide vivid highlights in the description of the fate of the wicked.

The First-Born of Death.

The phrase appears in Job 18.13:

Sickness ravages his skin,
the First-Born of Death devours his limbs.

The Masoretic text is unsatisfactory as it stands. It is perhaps best to change baddê, "the limbs", to dēway, "sickness", and read "sickness ravages his skin". The confused first half of the verse is interpreted in the light of the much clearer second. Death's First-Born ravages the skin of the wicked man and then devours his limbs.

Death's First-Born has been identified with Mot, the Canaanite god of death and of the underworld. In the Ugaritic texts, Mot is described as the "son/darling of El", the chief god of the pantheon of Ugaritic. It has also been suggested that Mot, in his role of ruler of the nether world, might legitimately assume the title, "first born" of El. /7 However, the Ugaritic texts provide no direct evidence that Mot was regarded as El's first-born. "Darling of El" rather than suggesting primacy of birth or genuine paternal affection should be interpreted as a euphemism for a feared and repulsive deity. Mot is not portrayed as a hunter. He lies with the gaping maw ready to devour those who come within his reach.

Mesopotamian mythology provides a closer identification. Namtar is the god of plague and pestilence. He is also the sukallu iršiti, "vizier of the underworld", and i ilitti d-ereškigal, "offspring of Ereshkigal", the queen of the underworld. /8 In Mesopotamian religion the first-born of any god was, if male, the vizier of his parent. As Namtar was both son of Ereshkigal and vizier of the underworld he was, in all probability, her first-born. The First-Born of Death is Namtar, the Babylonian god of plague who destroys the body of the wicked with plague and wasting sickness.

Death the King of Terrors

Job 18.14 goes on to describe Death as melek ballahot, "king of terrors."

He (the wicked) is taken from his secure refuge and they (BH) march him before the king of terrors

BH is to be followed in placing lišē^{vv} ʾōl šattū[^], "for

The grammar and sense of this verse in the Hebrew **text** are quite complex. Both the LXX and Vg render the **first** two phrases as statements rather than questions. **However**, the key to their correct interpretation lies in the context of the whole chapter which is one of utter **divine** condemnation of Israel and in the last phrase of the **verse** "pity is hidden from my eyes." Yahweh asks Death and Sheol to bring out their plagues and pestilences. A Canaanite background to this verse may be sought in Resheph, the god of pestilential fever. He appears with dbr, "plague", in Habakkuk 3.5. He was worshipped at Ebla where Dabir may also be mentioned as a patron god of the city. /13 The prophet uses these figures to underscore his dreadful message that Yahweh is prepared to give Samaria over to destruction and that the powers of the underworld do their work at his behest.

These same twin forces appear as partners in an agreement concluded in Isa 28.15a and invalidated in 18a:

For you said, "We have made a covenant with Death, and we have concluded a pact with Sheol (15a)."
But your covenant with Death will be invalidated, and your pact with Sheol will be void (18a).

hōzeh, "seer", in this context must mean some kind of agreement. This is borne out by the LXX diathēkēn and the Vg pactum, both meaning "covenant". It is not possible simply to reduce this verse to satirical language put into the mouths of the rulers by the prophets. That is to say, that they themselves describe their treaty with a neighbouring power as no more worthwhile than a "covenant with Death". Nor need one propose some secret rite connected with chthonic powers to secure immortality for the said rulers. /14 Two ideas are conveyed by the verse: one is the fact of a treaty with a neighbouring country; the other is a consultation of the powers of the underworld to determine or ensure the worth of that treaty by necromancy and sacrifice. This was by no means an uncommon practice in popular Israelite religion. /15 The "covenant with Death" may

have been made with Mot himself. J.H. Tigay has drawn attention to names compounded with māwet found in Hebrew inscriptions. /16

Job 28.23 refers to Sheol this time, linked with another power from the kingdom of Death, Abaddon. This verse comes from a poem which asks the question where is wisdom to be found. Unsuccessful in his quest in the land of the living, the seeker after wisdom proceeds to question Deep and Sea, tēhôm and yām, themselves figures of cosmic mythology. They respond negatively and the seeker journeys through the depths of the cosmic ocean to consult the powers of the underworld, Abaddon, "destruction" and Death. Even with their vast stores of arcane knowledge unavailable to the living, Abaddon and Death have heard only wisdom's merest whisper.

Death the Robber

Like "Death the Shepherd", this personification of death is found once only in the OT in Jeremiah 9.20:

For Death has come up through our windows,
he has entered our fortification;
to cut off the child from the street,
the young men from the squares.

Death, at the end of a long and full life, was accepted with wistful resignation in the OT. But the death which came early and tragically was dreaded. This is Death, the Robber, snatching the breath of life from people before their allotted span, plundering the children and young men, the future of the race. In Exod 12.23, Yahweh is accompanied on his mission of death to the first-born in Egypt by the "destroyer", hammašhîṭ. This figure appears to be a demon whose function was to enter the houses and slay the first-born. When Yahweh saw the blood smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Hebrews he did not allow the demon to enter them. Here we have the image of a death-dealing demon capable of entering houses. /17

There is a non sequitur in this verse. If the children and young men are already in the streets and squares, why is Death represented as coming in through the windows and into the palaces?

This may be resolved in one of two ways:

1. ki alah mawet may qualify both parts of the verse, "for Death has come up (from the underworld) to enter our palaces and to cut off the child....."
2. The interpretation may be that Death seizes the children and the young men so that they may neither play in the streets, nor lounge in the city squares.

The latter seems more satisfactory.

We have reflected here a popular superstition that Death could climb through windows to seize his prey. This verse has been linked to the description of the building of Baal's palace in the Ugaritic texts. /18 Baal is initially reluctant to allow the construction god, Kothar-wa-Hasis, to put a window in his new palace. Two reasons for this have been advanced: one that Mot, the god of death will enter and steal his daughters; /19 the other that Mot will come and seize tribute from Baal that is due to him. /20 However, the text, broken as it is, undoubtedly points out that Baal is, in fact, afraid of Yam, "Sea", who represents the chaotic and destructive aspect of the cosmic ocean. This ocean is held back only by Baal's power. A window might allow "Sea" to pour into the inhabited cosmos or it might permit Baal's gentle daughters, "Mist and Showers", to escape uncontrolled, or perhaps be overpowered or stolen away by "Sea". /21 Thus Yam, not Mot, is the one who is feared.

I would not go so far as to say that Mot is Baal's ally. /22 Rather, it seems that Baal, with the false bravado supplied by an excess of food and wine, boasts that the unpredictable and monstrous Mot will aid him put down any usurpers - an unwise boast as it turns out. /23 It is not possible to elucidate Jer 9.20 from the Ugaritic texts. Perhaps it's best simply

to indicate a popular and understandable superstition that Death slips through windows to steal away the breath of life. Mesopotamian mythology, however, provides a multiplicity of demons and disaffected spirits who roam the streets by night, slipping through windows and doors in search of their prey. The concept of the mashit, "destroyer", referred to above, shows that death-dealing demons were not alien to Hebrew thought.

In Ancient Egypt, Death was envisaged as a robber who overpowered people, bound them securely and did not free them until they had crossed into the underworld. He snatched them away, often before their time. /24 Death, the unrelenting robber, preyed not only on the aged, but on the child at its mother's breast. /25

In Jer. 9.20, the prophet employs the vivid picture of Death, the Robber, as Yahweh's agent in punishing an apostate people. The idea behind the figure may be that of an epidemic which preys upon the young

From the foregoing it may be concluded that the preponderance of the personifications of Death is found in the Wisdom Literature. There we are able to assume that they carry little or no mythological significance and, thus, cannot be regarded as providing any authentic information about beliefs concerning death, the underworld and the fate of the dead in the OT. The personifications are employed as literary imagery. The origins of that imagery may be sought in the comparative mythology of Canaan, Egypt and Mesopotamia. However, by the time the material surfaces in the Wisdom Literature, the mythology is moribund and functions chiefly in a literary context. At the same time, one cannot completely dismiss the disquietude that reference in literature to death and its attendant imagery evokes in any society.

Prophecy, however, appears to reflect superstitions and practices which were relatively widespread. Hosea indicated a common belief, by no means confined to ancient Israel, that various sicknesses were harbingers of death. Isaiah 28.15a, 18a betrays the common practice of necromancy to obtain aid and insight for the chthonic

powers. Finally, Jeremiah 9.20 provides evidence for the popular superstition that Death and his minions entered houses through a window to rob unwary humans of life.

Notes

1. M. Wakeman (God's Battle with the Monster, Leiden:Brill, 1973) refers to, but does not enlarge on some of these personifications of Death.
2. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.) Theological Dictionary of the OT, Vol 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1986), 199-203
3. W. McKane, Proverbs, (London:SCM, 1970),455
4. P. Barguet, Le Livre des Morts des Anciens Egyptiennes (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1968), 219-222, vignettes, text and commentary
5. Botterweck and Ringgren, op.cit. Vol 4 (1980) 172
6. K. Tallqvist, Sumerische-Akkadische Namen der Totenwelt (Helsinki: Studia Orientalia iv, 1934) 150
7. N.C. Habel, The Book of Job (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 281-288
8. Tallqvist, op.cit. 12-15, 88
9. J. B. Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts(Princeton: Univ. Press,1974) 110
10. J.C.L. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978) 69-74
11. M. Dahood, Proverbs and North-West Semitic Philology (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1963) 36
12. McKane , op.cit. 488
13. G. Pettinato, The Archives of Ebla (New York: Doubleday, 1981) 248 da-bi-ir dingir-eb-la^{ki} ; see also W.J. Fulco, The Canaanite God Resep (New Haven: American Oriental Series 8, 1976) passim
14. R.E. Clements, Isaiah: The New Century Bible Commentary (London: Morgan & Scott,1980) 229-232
15. J.B. Burns, "Necromancy and the Spirit of the Dead in the OT", Transactions of Glasgow University Oriental Society 26 (1978) 1-14
16. J.H. Tigay, You Shall Have No Other Gods(Harvard Semitic Studies, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 67
17. Professor John van Seeters (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) kindly pointed this out to me in a verbal communication
18. Gibson, op.cit. 57-66
19. U. Cassuto, "The Palace of Baal," JBL 61 (1942) 51-56

20. M.D. Coogan, Stories from Ancient Canaan (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 81-82
21. I am indebted to Professor Jack M. Sasson (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) for drawing my attention to an interesting parallel to my conjecture that Baal's daughters might be stolen by sea. In the Ancient Egyptian "Tale of the Two Brothers," the younger brother, Bata, has a wife fashioned for him by the god Knum. She is radiantly beautiful. Bata warns her not to go out of doors lest she is stolen away by the sea. A trans. may be found in : M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol ii: The New Kingdom (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1976) 207
22. W. McKane, Jeremiah, International Critical Commentary, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 210-212
23. Gibson, CML, 65-66, 68-69
24. C.E. Sander-Hansen, Der Begriff des Todes bei den Agyptern (Copenhagen: 1942) 17, Notes 1-11, 28
25. J. Zandee, Death as an enemy (Leiden, Brill, 1960), Studies in the History of Religions V 85-86

Dr John Barclay Burns is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies in George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia

Giovanni Garbini. History and Ideology in Ancient Israel

London: SCM Press, 1988.

pp.xvi, 222. £10.50

Anyone who has ever tried to teach a course on the history of ancient Israel which seeks to go beyond the retailing of the contents of one of the established textbooks on the subject is familiar with the experience of the conjuror who is about to perform his final trick, the one which is "not only difficult, but actually impossible". Like the conjuror, the lecturer is usually successful, though the result is achieved through sleight of mind rather than of hand. Lecturer and conjuror alike know that they are performing an illusion, even though their respective audiences may not always be aware of the fact.

The simple truth that fundamental problems of method are involved in the study of the history of ancient Israel, which has long been recognized, has recently given rise to serious discussions amongst scholars (notably at the 1986 SBL Annual Meeting as reported in JSOT 39), but nowhere yet have doubts as to whether a historical history of Israel can be written at all been expressed so clearly as they are in this book.

Originally published in Italian in 1986, the book begins with an Introduction in which the author, who is Professor of Semitic Philology in the University of Rome, describes how he came recently to concern himself with the problems of ancient Hebrew history-writing and how the book came to be written. Then follows a series of fourteen separate studies with the common theme of investigating, in the author's words, "how far the legacy of the ancient Hebrew historical tradition is history and how far it is ideology (and of what kind)".

The flavour of the book is conveyed succinctly on its cover by a series of questions: Why were the Hebrews

virtually ignored by the people who lived next to them? Why do we not have even one inscription from the forty Israelite kings, while we have inscriptions from minor Palestinian rulers who are otherwise unknown? Why does the Bible not tell us anything about a person Israel, the eponymous figure behind the Hebrew people? Why the 'twelve tribes', when there are never twelve when you count them? And so on.

Answers to these, and many other similar questions, may be found in this book, which should be required reading for all involved in Old Testament studies. As both translator and publisher, John Bowden has earned a double portion of gratitude for making it available in English.

The Queen's University of Belfast

D.R.G. Beattie

Jacob Neusner, What is Midrash?

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

pp.114.

It may seem strange, at first sight, to find a book with this title included in the Guides to Biblical Scholarship, and in the New Testament Series at that, but this development is to be welcomed as one more indication that what one scholar, whose work was recently reviewed in this journal, calls the academic ghetto of New Testament study is opening its gates further to admit enlightenment from other quarters of the broader area of which the study of the New Testament is properly a part. It can, certainly, come as no surprise to find that the author is the foremost - and most prolific - of contemporary scholars in Jewish Studies, whom many readers of Irish Biblical Studies will remember, even if

they are not already familiar with at least some of his writings, for his splendid lectures given in Belfast and Dublin two years ago.

With his customary thoroughness, Neusner begins by defining the term which is the subject of the book. In Part One, as well as considering three dimensions of Midrash: exegesis, document and process, he distinguishes three types of Midrash-exegesis - Midrash as Paraphrase, Midrash as Prophecy and Midrash as Parable - which derive from three distinct Judaism's (the use of the plural to indicate the diversity of Jewish outlooks in antiquity is a characteristic Neusnerism). After a brief chapter on Midrash within the Hebrew Scriptures, he proceeds, in Part Two, to illustrate Midrash as Paraphrase, found in the Septuagint and the Targumim, and Midrash as Prophecy, found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (which emanate from Essenic Judaism) and Matthew's Gospel (which stems from Christian Judaism). Part Three, which occupies somewhat more than half of the book, is devoted to Midrash as Parable or Allegory, as found in the Canon of the Judaism of the dual Torah (another Neusnerism, for what is more commonly known as Rabbinic, or Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism). Illustrations are taken from Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah and, as an introduction to comparative Midrash, the differing approaches of two documents to Num. 7:1, Sifre to Numbers and Pesiqta de Rab Kahana, are examined.

The book concludes with a substantial list of works "For Further Reading". In keeping with the established practice of the series, the book has no index though it does have a Glossary, which includes a useful Introduction to Talmudic and Midrashic Writings as well as a list of definitions of technical terms used in the book. Amongst the latter, I was pleased to note the explanation of "Rabbinic", which begins thus: "From 'rabbi', meaning 'my lord', hence, in our own language, simply 'mister'." Simple, down-to-earth explanations of this kind are all too often neglected in introductory textbooks.

Michael Wilcock, The Message of Chronicles

(Series: The Bible Speaks Today - edited by JA Motyer)

IVP, Leicester, 1987

287pp

It is the aim of the series to "expound the Biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable": and consequently this volume by Wilcock sets out to be informative and inspirational, rather than academic in tone.

There is a brief introduction (in which traditional questions such as date, authorship, relationship to Ezra-Nehemiah etc. are not tackled), the primary purpose of which is to emphasise the author's belief in the historical accuracy of the Books of Chronicles, and that they contain a message of relevance to the modern Church and world. He describes the Chronicles as more than just an alternative history to Samuel / kings: "it is a ... sermon" (p 14). He rejects any suggestion that the Chronicler has indulged in "inventive story-telling" - though he recognises that there are alterations, elaborations, and differences of emphasis between the Chronicler and the earlier historian. He concludes:-

"The Chronicler does not need to invent in order to edify. He lets the facts speak - some more plainly than others - and then tells us what they say; and it is 'what took place' that edifies" (p 17).

After the brief introduction, Wilcock moves straight into his commentary / exposition on the text. Having posed the question, "Can these bones live?", he makes a valiant attempt to bring life to the genealogies and lists of the first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles, demonstrating that from the "kaleidoscope of names" we can infer "a display of the Chronicler's chief concerns" (p 32) - ie the kingship and the priesthood. However, though the exposition is ingenious, and made readable by the extensive use of the metaphor of 'tree / branch / roots / fruit', occasionally it becomes just a little far-fetched, as indeed when Wilcock himself has to admit:-

"Although several of the details may be obscure to us, and the links between the sequences may not always be obvious, and the Chronicler himself may occasionally have found them

hard to reconcile or to complete, there is no escaping the impression that for him it is all of a piece." (p 29)

Another example of Wilcock's stretching the argument to the limits or credulity, is where he comments on the Chronicler's omission of the blacker side of David's reign. He likens the Chronicler's account of David's reign to the "official" portrait of a truly great man - painted to bring out his greatness, not his blemishes. He observes:-

"This is not to say that the Chronicler intends to flatter David. ... Everyone knows from Samuel / Kings what David was 'really' like. ... But he was also, just as 'really', the greatest of all of the kings of Israel, and the new portrait is the official one of David as he embodies the Kingship. To this end the Chronicler, although nowhere departing from the truth, is unashamedly selective in what he writes." (p 52)

While recognising the inspirational and non-academic intention of the series, I would like to have seen Wilcock wrestle more fully and in more detail with the historical problems, and with the differences in detail between Samuel / Kings and the Chronicler. A fuller account of the historical circumstances in which the Chronicler wrote would have been helpful; and (though various points are made in passing in the commentary) a concluding section drawing out the message of the books for today would have been worthwhile - especially in the light of the series aims (as already quoted). A bibliography would also have been useful to the reader who might wish to pursue the study of Chronicles further from a more academic standpoint.

Overall, however, Motyer has provided a valuable, necessary, and (with perhaps some exceptions as indicated) a reasonably convincing defence of the historical accuracy of the Books of Chronicles, aimed at a general readership rather than at student or the scholarly world. He gives a number of interesting new insights into the history of Judah as presented by the Chronicler, and fulfils the series aim of presenting his material in a readable form.

J. Patton Taylor

Duncairn and St. Enoch's Manse,
Belfast

Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians*,

SPCK 1987 pp182 £6.95

This is an exceedingly useful book especially if it is to be used by students of the New Testament background. It looks at the society in which the Church had to live and the light this can shed on the growth and development of the Church's moral teaching. If we are to understand the moral formation of the Christian Churches, these "communities of discourse" "communities of character", we must, claims Professor Wayne Meeks of Harvard, understand their world (p13) "Unfortunately all we have left from the Christian communities is words. In this book I invite the reader to join me in an effort to piece together, in our imagination, what we can of the world within which those words once worked."

The book divides up into five chapters. The first gives us the social setting where the Greek *polis* played such an important part with its own autonomy and self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) and constituted a "context of ethics", and notes the tensions that resulted when its authority was set over against the power of the Roman empire and its autonomy severely restricted. An interesting illustration of this tension is given in Carneades, head of the (Platonic) Academy at Athens when in 156/55 bc he came to Rome with two other leading philosophers to exhibit there the teaching of the main philosophical schools. Carneades gave two lectures on successive days, one argued for an ideal of universal justice, the second turned upside down the argument of the first, denying there was any justice by nature. "Rule..is by power alone; what makes nations, especially the Romans, great is robbery of others." (p31). In spite, however, of Aelius Aristides' claim (c 130 AD) that Rome nourished the life of the *polis* and had brought about equality between the humble and the great, their law codes distinguished between the upper classes and everybody else. The many social in Roman society were firmly separated and the understanding of what is "fitting" was determined by them ie what is "fitting" within one's circle in the social strata.

The second chapter deals with "The Great Traditions" (Greece and Rome), the third, with those of Israel. Dr Meeks in chapter two seeks to concentrate on the profile of moral biography that each of the philosophical schools

sketches out and deals in turn with Platonism (as represented by Plutarch), Stoicism (as represented by Musonius Rufus - an extensive treatment), Cynics and Epicureans. All of these agree that the aim of Philosophy is the well-wrought life. "Ethics is the craft of right living and it has to be learned. The one reliable tool that one has for sculpting the good life is reason" (p60); "the rational and therefore happy life is a life in accord with nature". But Meeks offers criticism of the philosophers. They failed to look at the fundamental issue of the time ie how the human values achieved in the classical *polis* and the Roman republic could be made effective in the vastly enlarged and transformed political and social world of the empire (cf p61)

The third chapter deals with Israel as one of the great traditions. "The fundamental context of Jewish ethical reflection was not the *polis* or the individual but Israel. And Israel was construed as a people under the special orders and protection of the one God" (p65). Ever since the Babylonian exile (6th cent bc) "Jewish life was stamped with a strong polarity between homeland and diaspora..For Israel, however, the tension was particularly acute because of the significance of the Land in their sacral traditions and symbols." (p66). Again while on the one hand they were marked off from the people among whom they lived by circumcision, Sabbath, food regulations, on the other they believed in sharing as fully as possible in the life of the city and could proudly call themselves "Alexandrians" or "Antiochenes" and fought for rights equal to those of citizens. As examples of the variety of Judaism of the time, Meeks selects representative figures, Ben Sira (author of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus), the Covenanters of Qumran, Philo and the Rabbis of the Mishnah. Meeks does not attempt to summarize the ethos represented in these writings - they are seriously diverse - yet he does select themes that have turned up again and again viz the moral structure of history, the people Israel, Scripture, the Law. Whatever the variety of emphasis, the first point in each form of the variety of Jewish ethics is to be Israel" (p96)

The fourth chapter is headed "The Christian Communities". It points out rightly that "if...we are looking for some 'pure' Christian values and belief unmixed with the surrounding culture, we are on a fool's errand" (p97). It looks at the shapes of the early Christian communities eg as sects,

Bruce M. Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Developments, and Significance

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987 pp x,326 £30

This is the third book from Professor Metzger on the area of Text and Canon of the NT. The first, The Text of the NT, Its transmission, Corruption and Restoration, appeared in 1964 and has become the standard text-book in the many theological Faculties and Colleges. The second, The Early Versions of the NT, Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations, appeared in 1977, which has again become the authoritative textbook; finally, we are glad to welcome this fine volume, again from the Clarendon Press and again almost certainly to follow its predecessors in becoming a standard work.

The introduction (1-8) sketches out the story of the growth and recognition of the NT canon. It attempts to identify the authorities acknowledged in primitive Christianity ie the Jewish Scriptures, the words of Jesus, apostolic interpretations of the significance of Jesus' person and work for the Church, apostolic Fathers in the sub-apostolic age when the standard of appeal was "the Lord and the apostles" (6).

Two chapters deal with the literature on the Canon published prior to and during the twentieth century, the latter a valuable updating of bibliography for the interested student. Chapter three deals with the "Period of Preparation: the Apostolic Fathers" and four includes an important section on the Nag Hammadi Tractates (84-90) and an equally important section on Marcion and his influence (90-99). Chapter five traces the development of the Canon in the East, in Syria and in Egypt, with a fulness of selected material that will satisfy those who have found difficulty in tracing the relevant information. e.g., it includes Aristides (127-128) and Pantaenus (129f)

Chapter six deals with development in the West, notable for the full treatment of the place of Justin Martyr (144-148) in Rome [the chapter deals with the localities Rome (143-151), Gaul (151-156) and North Africa (156-164)], One page is given over to "The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs" (156f) and the interesting

quite unique pastoral Tract, entitled Adversus Aleatores, "Against Dice-Players", preserved in several manuscripts. To the author, possibly a Catholic bishop writing in North Africa about 300 AD, all games of chance including dice-playing were inventions of the devil. It may be worth noting the final sentences:

Play at least for Christian stakes. In Christ's presence, angels and martyrs looking on the while, cast down your money on the table of the Lord; that patrimony of yours, which in mad heat you might have lost, divide among the poor; entrust your stakes to Christ the conqueror....Play out your daily game with the poor. Divert to church purposes all your income and furniture...Give yourself to incessant almsdeeds and works of charity that your sins may be forgiven you...Do not look back upon the dice. Amen (163)

Chapter seven deals with "Books of Temporary and Local Canoncity: Apocryphal Literature" (165-189), "the existence of such a lush growth of apocryphal literature is testimony to the powers of imagination possessed by Christian believers, orthodox and heretical alike." (189)

Chapter eight gives valuable treatments of the Muratorian Canon and Eusebius' classification of NT books (191-207). There was considerable doubt among the Eastern Fathers as to how to define the limits of the Canon (chapter nine), shown in the several lists which were drawn up and were intended to define the limits of the Canon. Athanasius, for example, was only one of several including Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus and others (209)

Part three (chapters 11 and 12) deals with historical and theological problems concerning the Canon which will repay close study. Dr Metzger concludes, "The knowledge that our NT contains the best sources for the history of Jesus is the most valuable knowledge that can be obtained from study of the early history of the Canon." (287)

Scholars and students alike will be grateful to Professor Metzger for this characteristically lucid, thorough and comprehensive treatment of the Canon which will serve as a basis for the study of this much debated subject.

Errata (Small blemishes in an otherwise superbly produced volume) have been noted: guaranty? p55; last instead of least, p66; Psalms, p232; Test instead of text, p267

households, clubs, schools and, finally, a Church (98-123) against their often different settings. In chapter five Dr Meeks seeks "to discern some of the patterns of meaning in the ways they (the Christian Church) talked and behaved the "grammar" of early Christian morality" (98)

This is all through a remarkably fresh and stimulating work, affording many worthwhile insights and thoroughly to be recommended.

30, Glenshesk Rd,
Ballycastle BT54 6PH

E.A. Russell

Walter Wink, Understanding the Powers - The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence

Fortress Press 1987 np

This book by the Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary has chapters on Satan, Demons, Angels of the Church, Angels of the Nations, Angels of Nature, Gods, Elements of the Universe. There are many interesting Observations and anecdotes which can only be properly evaluated by a psychologist, and much that will, no doubt, be easier to understand if, unlike the reviewer one has the opportunity to read the first volume of the trilogy, "Naming the Powers". In this review I shall comment only on some of the biblical material.

In the chapters on demons we are told(43) that the story of the Gerasene demoniac in the classic account in the Bible of "outer personal possession". The story is discussed at some length and there are some salutary remarks on exorcism in general. It is emphasized that exorcism should be utilized only after every other avenue of help has been exhausted. In this section (61) we read

"The person possessed displays 'impossible' physical contortions and undergoes convulsions. This is certainly true in the case of the Gerasene demoniac"

But the biblical accounts of the Gerasene demoniac say nothing of impossible contortions nor of convulsions.

The cleansing of the Temple is regarded as a paradigm of collective exorcisms (65). It is stated. "Each account, even John's, uses the formulaic term for exorcism ekballō to describe his (ie Jesus') act of

driving out' those who did commerce in the temple. The
eight one should give to the use of ekballō is uncertain:
it may be used, as in the driving of Jesus into the desert
by the Spirit, where there is no exorcism, while, on the
other hand, the 'classic' story of the Gerasene demoniac is
told by Mark and Luke without using ekballō at all.

Wink regards henotheism as the great revelation given
through Israel to the nations, and monotheism as an "abase-
ment of that gift"(124). Paul is cited as one who accepted
the existence of a plurality of gods, and in support of
this we are given the author's own translation of Gal.4.9:

Can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elements
whose slaves you want to be once more?"

But is this support unequivocal? In the preceding verse
Paul writes. "You were in bondage to beings that by nature
are no gods". In a note on p.189 on the Bible's treatment
of apparent leprosy as demon induced, it is suggested that
the church may have found leprosy hard to treat because it
was erroneously supposed that it was demonically induced,
and we are told, "Jesus for his part seems to wait for the
seizure to pass". But in Mark's account Jesus, whose power
to heal is set in contrast with the inability of the discip-
les, certainly treats the malady as a case of demon posses-
sion, and he "rebuked the unclean spirit". Then after the con-
vulsions he raised up the boy. Perhaps we have here a heal-
ing by stages like the healing of the deaf mute (Mk 7.31-7)
and the healing of the blind man (8.22-26). We are told:

The early church...regarded everyone prior to baptism as possessed
by virtue of nothing more than belonging to a world in rebellion
against God (51)

But, without modification, it is difficult to reconcile
this with Paul's statement in 1 Cor.7.12-16, that the un-
believing (ie unbaptized) partner in a marriage is consecrat-
ed by the believing one. One who is consecrated can hardly
be regarded as possessed.

Among the many notes at the end of the book is one on
John Davy's *Man and the Underworld*: Wink writes (297f):

I have found much to ponder in this essay, even where it
goes beyond what I can readily assent to.

I cannot find better words to describe my attitude to
masking the Powers

B. Chilton and J.I.H. McDonald, Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom
SPCK, London 1987(pb) £8.95 pp148

James Dunn and James Mackey have rightly set themselves to do a little bridge building between the segregated disciplines of theological studies. They are general editors of a new series: Biblical Foundations in Theology. Currently with the volume here under review they have issued their New Testament Theology in Dialogue. Our authors are: B. Chilton, associate Professor of NT at Yale whose book, A Galilaean Rabbi and his Bible was reviewed in IBS some time ago. His other publications show that his preoccupation is with the background sources of the NT in Israel and ancient Judaism. He associates here with J.I.H. McDonald, lecturer in Christian Ethics and NT Studies at Edinburgh whose book Kerygma and Didache appeared in 1980. At this point it would not be amiss to introduce a third collaborator. He/she might be from any of the disciplines of pastoral/political/social theology. Such a member of the trinity would ensure that what is so well covered and documented here concerning the NT times would have to conduct a dialogue with our times eg bio-ethics, consumerism, nuclear power, venereal disease etc. Of course both the general editor and our present authors could argue that they are getting down to the "foundations in theology." Granted, but ought we not expect the foundations to have the dimensions to cope with the building we now need? Can NT theology and exegesis be carried on without relating it both to the social and ethical issues, both of its own times and of our own. Communication calls for the latter as well as the former. Ten pages of bibliography reveal serious omissions in the area for which we plead.

The work done by each writer (and they kindly indicate which chapters received primary attention from each author) is valuable. They start off from the fact that the centre of Jesus' ministry is not the concept of love but the kingdom or rule of God. They define "kingship" in its dynamic, persuasive forms in ancient

Israel and in NT times. As we know, the term is found at least eighty times in the Synoptics and in John, the term "Life" seems analogous as well as the reiterated "I am" sayings. There is a wide-ranging survey of scholars who struggled in the earlier part of this century with the various types of eschatology by which the kingdom should be interpreted, Schweitzer, Bultmann, Dodd, Jeremias, Conzelmann, Schurman etc. None satisfies our two authors who maintain that "the Kingdom should be taken on its own terms, and that it may be explored for immediately ethical implications rather than run through the sieves of scholarly conceptions of eschatology."

Chilton contributes two opening chapters on "the Kingdom in Word" and "the Kingdom in Deed." The parables of the Gospels furnish ways in which we participate in the Kingdom. A key word is "performance" which "refers both to the activity which results in the telling of a parable, and to the activity which may attend the hearing of a parable." "The Kingdom in word, a parable performed and repeated, elicits and, at the same time, reflects the Kingdom in deed." Consideration of parables leads naturally to action in keeping with what they reveal. This leads to "ethics which are consistent with the Kingdom, not to ethics which are held fully to express the meaning of the Kingdom."

At this point one would welcome what Reinhold Niebuhr and his followers would have said about the "relevance of the Kingdom." However, we have our second author with his two chapters on the "theology of the Kingdom" and the "Praxis of the Kingdom", since our authors claim that "the vital interaction of exegesis and theology has inspired us both." So it is back to the texts! McDonald looks at a series of eight cameos which reveal how deep and wide are the dimensions of the Kingdom in the OT. Then he goes on to do the same for the symbolic world of the synoptics. The Kingdom is transcendent, dynamic and inspiring as it unites ethics with eschatology instead of the opposite. Entering the Kingdom demands repentance. Acceptance

of it is a matter of both liberation and obedience. The ethics of the Kingdom is not a matter of command. Rather it has to be response to the dynamic and transcendent reality, when one is faced with human need, not only becoming as a child to enter it but to grow as a child of God, sustained by the life of communion in doing the will of God.

There is an ingenuous reference to "a little publication" entitled "The Kingdom of God in North East England Today", edited by James Dunn with a dozen contributors, which provides "interesting illustration of our theme." Such "earthing" of so much that is searching and demanding in this book would really enhance its worth. So in commending this volume, we may suggest reading that "little publication" at the same time.

Union Theological College
Belfast

James R. Boyd

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